

Deer Industry New Zealand
FORMAL GENERAL MEETING
INVERCARGILL, 2008

Quality Assurance Report: John Tacon
(Quality Manager)

Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

I'd like to cover the following topics today. Velvet, Transport and Animal Welfare and in doing so I will touch on a number of points throughout my presentation.

Audits

Let's look firstly at last season's velvet audits.

As you're aware in past seasons there's been a target of 20% of velvetters for audits

Prior to last season we negotiated with the NVSB partners and the constituent bodies with the view to reduce the number of audits from 20% to 10% of participants

This was agreed to by all parties and implemented

This season's findings showed similar results to previous years and the end report that goes to NAWAC will show this.

That said we still have concerns regarding the findings. They're not by any means perfect.

I mean, they should be good. When you think about it all participants know they're going to be audited so they should be prepared.

However there were still some who completely failed their audits

There were still a number who had major and minor faults many of which bordered on a failure.

I do appreciate there were some circumstances where some velvetters were given minor failures because of some pedantic questions being asked during the audit however that aside in the cold light of day one would have to ask

"If there is this level of non-compliance in controlled situations such as the audits then what's the true picture out there in un-controlled situations".

That's why it's so important to audit the programme not only to keep everyone focused but also to keep a picture of where it's all at so that as an industry we can "Confirm the integrity of velvet removal in New Zealand".

Velvet ID tags

You will remember last year that I spoke about the velvet ID tags and the rising costs. I suggested too there were rumours floating about where the tags were being used for purposes other than velvet tagging.

I'm not sure whether this was the reason but the number of tags distributed prior to last season was way below any other year.

Unfortunately this year is no exception the costs have once again increased. Believe it or not it's a difficult product to source as the tags have to meet specific requirements.

So rather than go ahead and purchase at this time we're looking at the introduction of a new tag. A new concept if you like. Yes it will mean change and I'm aware that many people don't like change and bear in mind this tag is still being tested to ensure it can meet the needs.

It will mean that you will have to thread the label onto the tag just the same as you do now with the black sleeve.

There are advantages though in that the labels will come in sequential order in a sheet of 50. So there is no need to sort out tags into numerical order as in the past.

And the tags are much easier to read.

The label can be written on with a permanent marker if you wish to record any info for yourselves such as the name or number of the stag etc.

The NVSB committee is in favour of these tags.

If this system works and is accepted by all concerned then it would save us around \$30,000 per consignment.

I'm asking that if you have a view either way can you respond back through your DFA committee member on the NVSB in order that some firm decisions can be made.

Compliance to the NVSB programme

Every season we go through the hassles of getting everyone compliant with the NVSB programme. That's not just the audit side of things but also the administrative side as well. Each year there's usually some who finish up being disgruntled with the system and believe they are hard done by for one reason or another.

You all know there are three important dates that the admin side of the NVSB works to.

November 20th is the date by which NVSB fees should be paid. However as in the past season there were still 70 people outstanding 3 months after that date. At the seasons end there were still 25 people outstanding. We aren't a debt collecting agency and it can be somewhat stressful for admin staff to personally ring farmers or farm workers to recover money that should have been paid 9mths earlier.

Likewise for the supervisory visits or consultations for mechanical block the date for completion of these is December 15.

It's the contracted veterinarian's responsibility to advise the NVSB of the date of completion. Sometimes these vets can be a little remiss indeed and the admin staff is chasing them up at the end of the season with phone calls and letters as well.

Then the last requirement March 31 for the return or the signing off of the velvet record book and the reconciliation of returned drugs.

The same system applies with the vets. It's their responsibility to advise NVSB administration. We send out client status reports to vets each month reminding them of these requirements and when there is no response by June a letter is sent to the vets asking for the information. If there is no response from that then a letter is sent direct to the velvetter and cc'd to the vet.

So it's not easy and hey I'm not making any excuses for anyone.

There's been some good comments feeding back so far from some of the recent Deer Farmers AGM's in this regard and the NVSB administration will make some changes to the way things happen.

One comment was that there could be more communication from the NVSB around the velvet season so with that in mind we'll take out a small section in the Deer Industry News and other industry publications leading up to and during the velvet season where we'll have regular reminders of the requirements and responsibilities for both velvetters and vets.

We will also rewrite all the generic letters that are sent out to both velvetters and vets and word them in such a way so that they still have the same meaning but maybe not so offensive to some people.

Hopefully this new season will produce some better results for everyone.

Welfare issues from a MAF perspective

While we're talking velvet I'd like to touch on some welfare issues from a MAF perspective

- Length of antler
- Damaged antlers
- Velvet removal
- Concerns about compliance with NVSB

Code of Recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Welfare of animals transported within New Zealand.

Everybody should be aware that this code states

The following must not be transported

"Deer with bleeding antler stubs, or in the first week after velvetting.

The exception being spikers with the NaturO ring still attached"

And *"Deer with velvet antler greater than 60mm"*

MAF have agreed with industry to change the measurement from 60mm above the pedicle to 110mm measured from the centre of the skull (between the pedicles).

This should make it easier for everybody, MAF included.

This will be the measurement for any trigger point for any response if required in the future.

Over length antler will not be recorded as an animal welfare case as in the past.

MAF will advise the processor and transporter of over-length antler and expect that this message should filter down to the supplier.

However the 110mm is still the trigger for transport and drivers will still work to this rule.

If there are consistent breaches then MAF will likely take some other form of action with those suppliers and transporters.

As usual, any damaged velvet antler will still be treated as a welfare case and graded on its merits to any of the three tiers of welfare cases MAF deal with.

That original standard (60mm) was put in place to try to prevent damage from occurring in the first place.

The longer the velvet the greater risk there is for damage to occur.

So let's not get carried away ----- and think we can put anything on the truck. The standard is still 110mm in length.

The Code of recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Welfare of Deer during the Removal of Antlers

This code states:

“Velvet antler removal is a controlled surgical procedure in this code”.

And also under the Animal Welfare Act.

As far as compliance with velvet removal is concerned MAF Bio-Security NZ flagged sometime ago that priorities for them this coming year will be on Bobby Calves and on Velvet removal.

There will be increased surveillance of suppliers of velvetted animals.

What they are proposing is to monitor every consignment of animals that have been velvetted and sent for slaughter during the season. They will make contact with each and every supplier who isn't a member of the NVSB asking the questions how the velvet was removed and by whom.

They are serious and intend to close the loop and identify any illegal velvetters.

So as a result of that there will be less emphasis on antler length.

But increased surveillance on velvet removal in order that MAF too can also **“Confirm the integrity of velvet removal in New Zealand”**.

As an industry we will work with MAF to help achieve this end.

I'd like to leave this section with a thought for everyone to ponder for the near future.

I'm speaking in general here.

We are well aware of the shortage of veterinarians in the field; some of the older more experienced one's in deer have retired.

For some vets deer are now only a very small percentage of their businesses.

This is possibly more so in some regions than others.

As far as the current NVSB program is concerned we need veterinarians to ensure it all functions properly. Quite simply we can't operate without them.

I'm suggesting maybe it's time to think about the need for trained "veterinary technicians" for the want of a word.

A person who is a trained and skilled in the art of all things velvetting.

Who is contracted to the veterinary clinic to perform velvetting and or supervisory visits/ consultations, training and so on?

I am certainly not suggesting people could start up a little business on their own to do this. It would have to be a person contracted to a veterinary clinic.

I see this as a possible way to ease the situation I believe we are progressively getting into. So again I ask that you think it over and respond to your DFA representatives on the NVSB committee.

Transport

You will all be aware that the issue surrounding the transport of weaned deer was resolved with the cooperation of NAWAC and the Status Quo remains.

That was a logical outcome and industry best practice will prevail at least until the review can take place.

I have mentioned in previous presentations about MAF VA and their role on venison plants and how as an industry we can work together towards quality management.

I've also mentioned in the past how they're now becoming much more organised and calibrated in their reporting of issues and have developed guidelines that are practical and achievable.

MAF are starting to gather a whole raft of information from all processing plants, not just for deer, and passing this information on so that we can try to put procedures in place to correct any irregularities.

You can see by this graph the number of welfare cases submitted over that period of time and yes you can see the graph line goes up for cervine animals during the velvet period.

And in this graph the submissions are broken down into 13 different categories or types of welfare issues and yes the velvet cases by far out weigh all others.

So we can start to form a good picture of what's happening. However it's still early days yet

Likewise we now have ante mortem statistics so we know the number of animals arriving on trucks that are dead or dying and the number of animals condemned in the yards and so on.

For 6mths from July through December 07 there were:

41 deer that died during transport. There were

188 deer that died or were condemned in the yards and there were

30 deer put up for emergency slaughter during that time.

That's a whole lot of deer ---- in anyone's language.

I'd suggest a lot of those statistics could have been prevented.

One of the areas where we can prevent some of this happening is in transport.

We've had transport standards for the cartage of deer for many years now.

Those standards were put in place because of the large number of dead or injured animals turning up at DSPs in the early days.

Added to that was the large numbers of down graded carcasses and hides throughout the industry.

Those standards worked very well and the incidence of bruising and downgrades dropped from around 28% to around 2.5% which in itself was a huge saving to the industry.

At the same time the % of hide damage also dropped dramatically.

Just recently at a venison processors meeting in Wellington they discussed the marked increase in bruising and hide damage coming through their plants once again.

Some are saying it's getting back to the old days with the number of bruised animals that they see.

I am also aware of the problems being encountered with the deer hides in more recent times, and the large numbers of damaged and defective hides coming through the system.

A lot of this damage is coming from animals that are trucked in over-loaded cattle pens.

Some processors report there is nowhere near the same problem coming from the designated deer transporters who do it the right way.

That in itself tells a story.

Hey we've **been there done that** and we know why this damage occurs so why are we heading back down that pathway?

Those standards are there for a perfectly good reason and it makes me cringe when I hear people touting that they can get between 160 and 180 deer on a load going to the works even more especially when they are going on a long distance.

The only way this can be achieved is to overload them into the larger cattle pens and that's just simply playing Russian roulette with your deer.

Do we really want to go back to seeing scenes like this? Or this?

That's what's left on a carcass after trimming?

I would suggest not and for a very good reason.

As farmers you guys go all out to produce a top quality product.

Something that you can be justifiably proud of so why the hell would you want to risk everything going wrong on the back of a truck because the driver is too lazy to convert the crate the proper way to transport your deer?

Or because someone else says yeah it's OK to put as many on as you can because it will be cheaper.

I'm asking next time your transporter arrives to pick up your deer and you see the big cattle pens being used ask the questions and see what response you get.

Then insist on your deer being transported in the proper manner.

If they won't, or can't do this, then consider using someone else.

Someone who **will** look after your deer and your interests in the proper way.

Thanks for your time.